

Maine CDC/DHHS Top Questions on 2009 H1N1 Flu November 9, 2009

Top Questions from the week of November 2:

Q. I have the flu. Why won't my doctor test me for H1N1?

A. In many cases, it is unlikely that your doctor will test you for H1N1 flu. There are several reasons:

- We are monitoring the progress of H1N1 in the state through a number of different data sources, rather than counting individual lab reports. Now that we know that there have been cases of H1N1 in every county in Maine, we no longer need to test every case.
- Testing everyone with flu-like symptoms would overwhelm our laboratories, so we need to save those resources for those who are most severely ill, where a confirmed diagnosis might influence treatment.
- Testing will usually not change either treatment or the steps you should take if you are sick. The treatments for both seasonal and H1N1 flu are the same.
- If you are not in a group of people at high risk for complications and do not have severe symptoms, you may recover on your own.
- If you are in a high risk group, your health care provider will know if you need to be tested for H1N1, based on current guidance from the US CDC.

Q. I have flu in my school/day care. What should I do?

We expect that most schools in the state will eventually have some cases of the flu.

Schools and day cares do not need to notify parents of each individual case of the flu. Parental notification may be helpful in some situations. If you have cases of flu in your school and are unsure whether you should notify parents, you may contact Maine CDC for guidance. [There are specific reporting guidelines and forms related to increased absenteeism.](#)

If you are a school or day care administrator and have questions about reporting increased absenteeism, precautions to take, or the ways in which to notify parents, please contact our Clinical Consultation line at 1-800-821-5821 or e-mail disease.reporting@maine.gov.

Maine CDC is not issuing directives to close schools or day cares at this time. These are administrative decisions, largely based on staffing capacity.

There have been cases of the flu in every county of the state. Parents should assume that their children will be exposed to the flu.

We encourage all families and staff to focus on effective steps you can take to keep healthy.

- Stay home if you are sick, until you are fever-free for a full 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medicine.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow, or into a tissue. Throw this tissue away.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, but especially after coughing and sneezing. Alcohol-based hand gels can also be used.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes. Germs can be spread by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid contact with sick people. If you are at very high risk for complications, **you may want to avoid large crowds.**
- [When vaccine is available](#) to you, consider getting both seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines.
- **Contact your health care provider if there are [flu-like symptoms](#) in a household where anyone is younger than 2 years old, 65 years or older, pregnant, and/or has an underlying medical condition. There are prescription medicines (antivirals such as Tamiflu®) that may help.**
- **Although most people can stay home to recover without seeing a health care provider, anyone with the flu should seek medical attention for:**
 - Dehydration
 - Trouble breathing
 - Getting better, then suddenly getting a lot worse
 - Any major change in one's condition

Q. Why are you vaccinating all these healthy school kids when I can't find vaccine for my pre-schooler?

A. All school children are at risk for H1N1 because of their age. Four of the ten people hospitalized due to H1N1 last week were otherwise healthy children.

There are nine formulations of the H1N1 vaccine, which have different age restrictions. Much of the vaccine available to us first was the nasal spray, which is only licensed for otherwise healthy, non-pregnant people ages 2-49 – the largest high priority group fitting the restrictions for that vaccine formulation is school children.

Maine CDC was only recently able to place orders for specific formulation of H1N1 vaccine for children ages 6 months – 3 years-old. We have distributed our entire allotment of doses to pediatric and family practices across the state, and anticipate being able to distribute about 20,000 doses of this vaccine before Thanksgiving.

There are other formulations of vaccine that can be administered to pre-school aged children, which are also slowly increasing in Maine. We are distributing those formulations to hospitals (who are mainly redistributing to their associated practices), pediatric and family practices, as well as home health agencies.

If your pediatrician did not have vaccine earlier on, please check back in.

There have been some clinics for young children. Check the clinic locator at www.maine flu.gov for clinics open to young children.

Q. My child is under 10 and has received his first dose of H1N1 vaccine. Will there be enough vaccine to get the second dose 28 days later? The first dose was a nasal spray, what if nasal spray is unavailable later?

A. US CDC recommends that the two doses of H1N1 vaccine for children 9 years of age and younger be separated by 4 weeks. There is no maximum number of days between doses.

Ideally the same type of vaccine – nasal spray or injection – should be used for both doses. If different types of vaccine are used for the first and second doses, however, there is no need to revaccinate a child.

How to Stay Updated

- **Flu News:** View current Maine CDC press releases, Thursday morning weekly updates, and urgent updates from our Health Alert Network (HAN) by visiting: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/maineflu/flu-news.shtml>. RSS feeds are available for the weekly updates and HAN.
- **Follow Maine CDC's Social Media Updates:**
 - **Facebook** (search for "Maine CDC")
 - **Twitter** (<http://twitter.com/MEPublicHealth>)
 - **MySpace** (www.myspace.com/mainepublichealth)
 - **Maine CDC's Blog** (<http://mainepublichealth.blogspot.com>)

Call or Email Us

- For clinical consultation, outbreak management guidance, and reporting of an outbreak of H1N1 call Maine CDC's toll free 24-hour phone line at: 1-800-821-5821.
- General Public Call-in Number for Questions: 1-888-257-0990
Deaf and Hard of Hearing phone number: 1-800-606-0215
Phone lines are open Monday - Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- Email your questions to: flu.questions@maine.gov